

January 19, 2021

Dear Member of Congress,

We the undersigned organizations urge you to cosponsor the State Taskforce Opportunity Program (STOP) Bullying Act sponsored by Congressman Raja Krishnamoorthi (IL-8). This legislation will establish a federal grant program through the Department of Education that will award grants to states to establish anti-bullying and harassment task forces. Every child should feel safe at school – period. Yet, we continue to see the pervasive problem of bullying and harassment in our schools nationwide, especially for LGBTQ+ students who are transgender, nonbinary, Black, Indigenous, people of color, and people with disabilities.

Hostile school environments have been proven to have a detrimental effect on the academic success and health of students. To combat this, thirteen states and the District of Columbia have convened taskforces to evaluate, research, and collaborate with communities on how to make schools safer for all students, regardless of their actual or perceived race, color, national origin, sex, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity, or religion. We continue to learn how the existence of commissions or task forces at the state level can provide long-term benefits, allowing flexibility to states to work on the specific needs of their school districts.

According to GLSEN's 2019 National School Climate Survey, schools are not safe for LGBTQ+ students and more than 8 in 10 experienced identity-based harassment or assault in school.¹ More than half of those experiencing harassment never reported it to their school, most often because they doubted intervention would make things better. Transgender and nonbinary students face especially high rates of discrimination and victimization. They are denied access to school facilities and feel unsafe at school. Students who face anti-LGBTQ+ discrimination or victimization were three times more likely to miss school in the past month, had lower grade point averages, and felt lower self-esteem.

Twenty years of research shows that dedicated support from teachers and staff, LGBTQ+ inclusive school policies, inclusive curriculum, and continued investments in resources correlate to better school outcomes for LGBTQ+ students. For example, in 2019, 62% of LGBTQ+ students had a GSA (Gay Straight Alliances or Gender and Sexuality Alliances) at their school, and these students felt safer, were less likely to miss school, and were less likely to hear homophobic or transphobic remarks than those without a GSA.

During this time of mass disruption and trauma when students' wellbeing and educational opportunities are at even greater risk due to the COVID-19 pandemic and systemic racism, it is

¹ Kosciw, J. G., Clark, C. M., Truong, N. L., & Zongrone, A. D. (2020). *The 2019 National School Climate Survey: The experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer youth in our nation's schools*. New York: GLSEN. <https://www.glsen.org/research/2019-national-school-climate-survey>

imperative that communities experiencing the greatest impacts have seats at decision-making tables across the country. By establishing a program that facilitates collaboration between educators and communities on how to meet the challenges of this moment we can help ensure that our most disadvantaged students can thrive and reach their full potential.

We thank you for your consideration and welcome the opportunity to connect further on this legislation. If you have any questions, please contact Aaron Ridings of GLSEN at aaron.ridings@glsen.org.

Sincerely,

American Psychological Association

Athlete Ally

Bayard Rustin Liberation Initiative

Center for Disability Rights

CenterLink: The Community of LGBT Centers

Council of Administrators of Special Education

EDGE Consulting Partners

Education Law Center

Equality California

Equality North Carolina

Family Equality

FORGE, Inc.

GLSEN

Hindu American Foundation

Howard Brown Health

Human Rights Campaign

National Association of Secondary School Principals

National Black Justice Coalition

National Center for Parent Leadership, Advocacy, and Community Empowerment (National PLACE)

National Equality Action Team (NEAT)

PFLAG National

Public Justice

Sandy Hook Promise

Sikh Coalition

Silver State Equality-Nevada

The Trevor Project